

Sri Krishna Kathamrita



Bindu

Issue 590

atithi-sevā

Service to Uninvited Guests





Sri Krishna Kathamrita Bindu

Fortnightly email mini-magazine from Gopal Jiu Publications

Issue No. 590

Śrī Ṣaṭ-tilā Ekādaśī

25 January 2024

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SERVING GUESTS

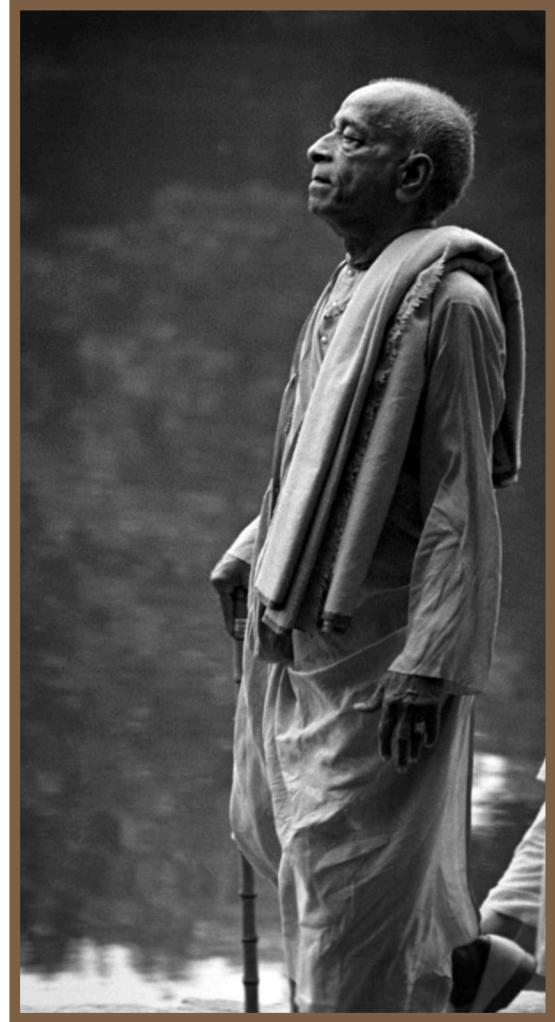


His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

In India the custom is that even an ordinary person is offered a glass of water if he suddenly visits and one cannot offer him foodstuff. If there is no water, then one can offer a sitting place, even if it is on straw mats. And if one has no straw mat, he can immediately cleanse the ground and ask the guest to sit there. Supposing that a householder cannot even do that, then with folded hands he can simply receive the guest, saying 'Welcome.' And if he cannot do that, then he should feel very sorry for his poor condition and shed tears and simply offer obeisances with his whole family, wife, and children. (Purport to *Bhāg.* 4.22.10.)

According to the Vedic principles, there must always be a guest in the householder's house. In my childhood I have actually seen my father receive not less than four guests every day, and in those days my father's income was not very great. Nonetheless, there was no difficulty in offering *prasāda* to at least four guests every day. (Purport to *Cc. madhya* 3.41.)



Unknown photographer.

Cover: Krishna and his wives serve Sudama Vipra in Dwarka. Vintage painting. Unknown artist.

Unknown artist. 1780. Kangra, Himachal Pradesh



Sita, Rama and Lakshman at the ashram of Bharadvaj Muni

Atithi means uninvited guest, hospitality. If somebody comes at your home without your invitation, he is called *atithi*. *Tithi* means particular time and date. But a person who arrives at your home without any invitation on a particular time and date, is called *atithi*. *Atithi-satkāra*. (From a lecture in Bombay, 14 August 1975.) 🍌

**AS GOOD AS
SERVING GURU**



Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada

A stranger who stays in a householder's residence for one day and leaves the next is called an *atithi*, or guest. The householders have the opportunity to serve such guests for only one day. It is the *vyavahāra-dharma*, or rule of etiquette, for a householder to serve his guests. Honoring guests is as good as serving the spiritual master; in other words, a guest is as worshipable as Lord Narayan. (Purport to *Caitanya-bhāgavata ādi* 5.23)

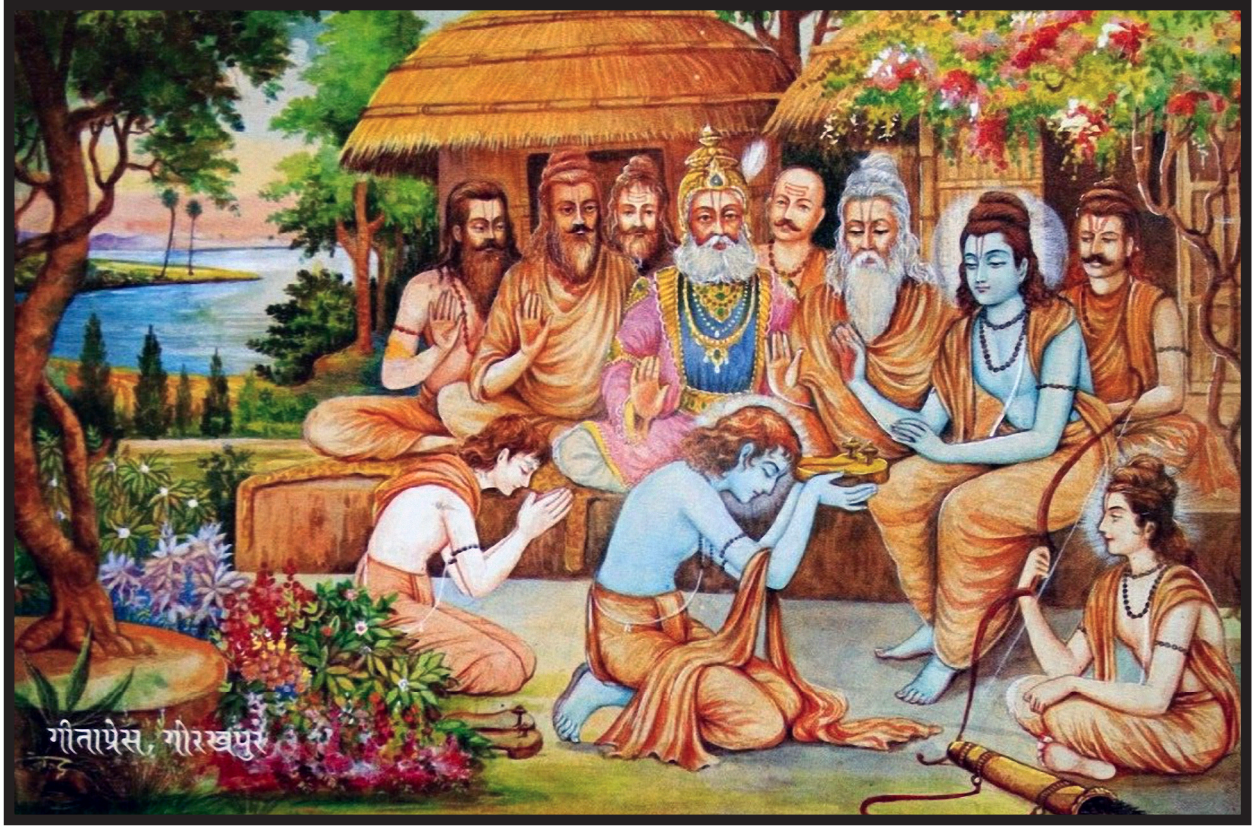
Those attached householders who give up the service of guests who stay for one day and wandering *sannyāsīs* who are engaged in pleasing

Lord Vishnu and remain busy in householder duties like cooking for themselves are lower than even birds and beasts. Inferior animals like birds and beasts fly in the sky or wander the earth in order to gather their food and have little opportunity to collect. But since human beings are the highest social entities, they are obliged to follow the principles of *varṇāśrama*. If they are averse to even these principles, then they will be counted among the unsheltered naked birds and beasts, who are busy simply filling their own bellies. Apart from filling their own bellies, human beings have the higher responsibility of collecting and protecting items for the service of Vishnu. For this reason, giving shelter and food to guests and wandering mendicants who desire to please Narayana and benefit the living entities is among their social duties. If human beings transgress this duty, they will be considered lower than even birds and beasts. (Purport to *Caitanya-bhāgavata ādi* 14.22) 🍌



Artist Accha Ram, Bikaner, 1675-1700

Garuda carrying Rukmini and Krishna



Unknown artist. Gita Press. Gorakhpur.

Bharat and Satrughna offer respects to Rama

THE DHARMA OF A GRIHASTHA



Sri Srimad Gour Govinda Swami Maharaja

A *grhastha* is not attached to money, so why does he earn money? *tomāra kāryera* — “To meet the expenditure of your *saṁsāra*, your family, I earn money. Otherwise, I have no need of money.”

A *grhastha* earns for Krishna’s family, Krishna’s *saṁsāra*, and some portion he will put into savings in a bank or a safe. For what purpose? In case some *atithis*, guests, come without prior notice — some traveling mendicants who arrive all of a sudden — to render service to them a *grhastha* should save some money.

Birds, beasts, species other than human, never save anything. Every day they go out and whatever necessity they have they immediately use. But a human being, *grhastha*, will save. For what purpose? To render nice service to guests — *atithi-sevā*. That is *grhastha-dharma*, the *dharma* of a *grhastha*. Householders who don’t do so are like naked animals, birds and beasts, because they

cannot save. They have no opportunity to save, and they cannot serve guests. However, when one becomes a householder, *grhastha*, if one doesn’t do *atithi-sevā* — rendering service to guests who appear suddenly without prior notice — then one is no better than a bird or a beast. 🍌

— From a lecture in Toulouse, France, 15 August 1994.

HOMES OF JACKALS

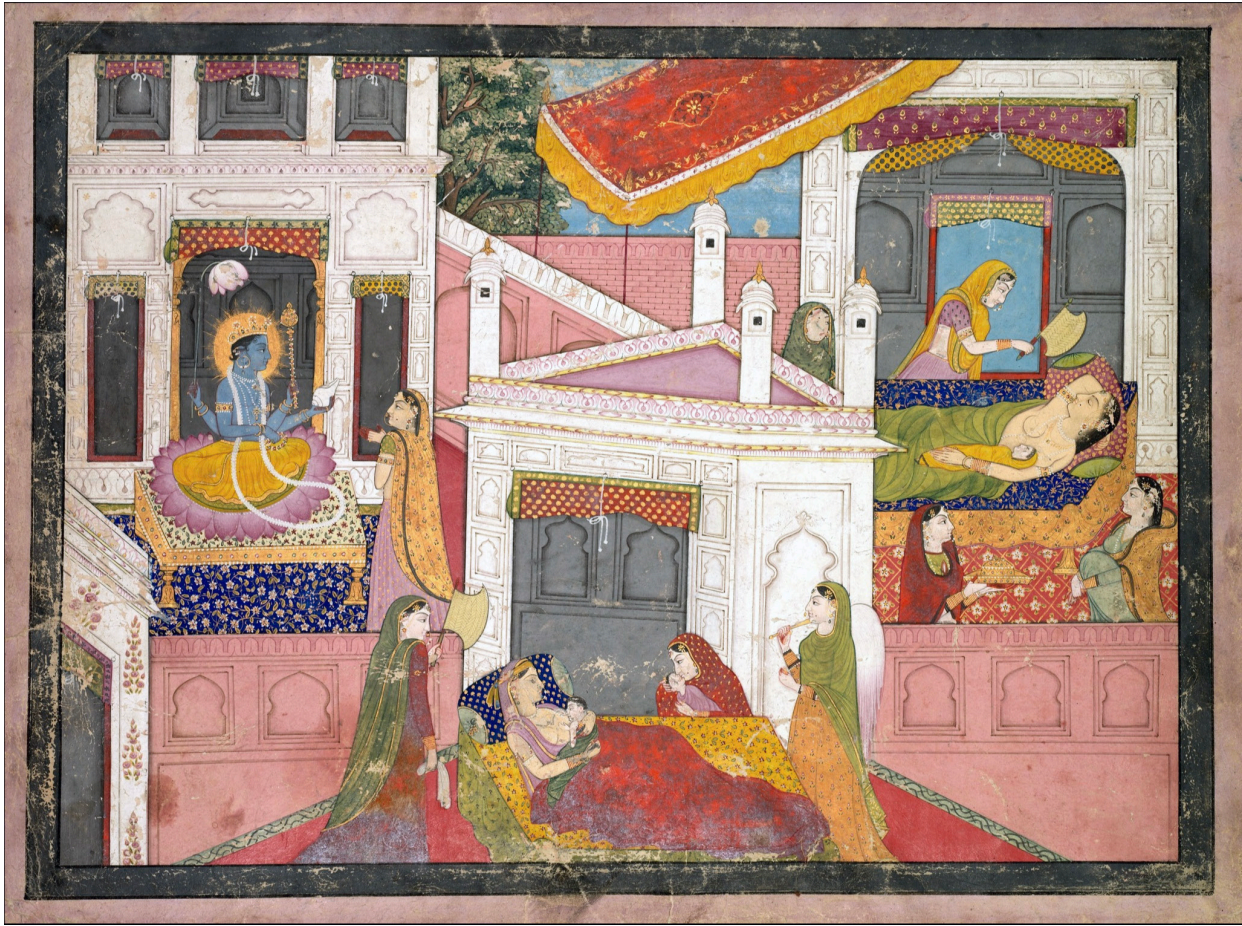
Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 8.16.7

*grheṣu yeṣv atithayo nārcitāḥ salilair api
yadi niryānti te nūnaṁ pherurāja-grhopamāḥ*

Homes from which [uninvited] guests go away without having been received even with an offering of a little water are like those holes in the field that are the homes of jackals.



Unknown artist. Pahari, Kangra painting. From the court of Aniruddh Chand. c. 1820–30.



The birth of Lord Ramachandra and his brothers. Painting from the Bāla-kāṇḍa section of the Adhyātma-rāmāyaṇa of the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa

GLORIES OF SERVING GUESTS



From Nārada Pañcarātra

atithir yasya puṣṭo hi tasya puṣṭo hariḥ svayam
harau tuṣṭe gurus tuṣṭo gurau tuṣṭe jagat trayam

Lord Hari himself is pleased with one who has pleased a guest (atithi — literally “one who comes unexpectedly or at no particular time”). When Hari is pleased then the guru is pleased. And when the guru is pleased then the whole world becomes satisfied.

adhiṣṭhātā 'tithir gehe santataṁ sarva-devatāḥ
tīrthāny etāni sarvāṇi puṇyāni ca vratāni ca

tapāṁsi yajñāḥ satyaṁ ca śīlaṁ dharmaḥ sukarma ca
apūjitaṁ atithibhiḥ sārḍha sarve prayānti te

When a guest remains in a house, all of the devas reside with him in that house. Therefore, all holy places, all good merits, vows, austerities, sacrifices, truth, fame, good conduct, dharma, and righteous acts leave a place together with a guest that goes away after not having been properly worshiped.

strī-ghnaiś caiva kṛta-ghnaiś ca brahma-ghnair guru-talpagaiḥ
viśvās aghātibhir dustair mitra-drohibhir eva ca
satya-ghnaiś ca kṛta-ghnaiś ca pāpibhiḥ sthāpibhis tathā
dānāpahāribhiś caiva kanyā-vikrayibhis tathā
sīmāpahāribhiś caiva mithyā-sākṣi-pradātṛbhiḥ
brahmasva-hāribhiś caiva tathā sthāpyasva-hāribhiḥ

LOWER THAN A BEAST

Srila Vrindavan Das Thakur's
Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata ādi 14.22

gṛhasṭha ha-iyā atithi-seva nā kare
paśu-pakṣi ha-ite 'adhama' bali tā're

If a householder does not serve his guests, he is considered lower than the birds and beasts.





Painting by Raja Ravi Varma.

Draupadi humiliated in Virata's darbar by Kichaka

vr̥ṣa-vāhair devalaiś ca tathaiva grāma-yājibhiḥ
 śūdrātra-bhojabhiś caiva śūdra-śrāddhāha-bhojibhiḥ
 śrī-kṛṣṇa-vimukhair viprair hiṁsrair nara-vighātibhiḥ
 gurāv-abhaktai rogārtaiḥ śaśvan mithyā-pravādibhiḥ
 vipra-strī-gāmibhiḥ śūdrair mātṛ-gāmibhir eva ca
 aśvattha-ghātibhiś caiva patnībhiḥ pati-ghātibhiḥ
 pitṛ-mātṛ-ghātibhiś ca śaraṇāgata-ghātibhiḥ
 brāhmaṇa-kṣatraviṭ śūdraiḥ śilās varṇāpahāribhiḥ

That person who does not duly worship a guest is compared to one who kills his wife; who is treacherous;

who kills a Brahmin; who has sex with the wife of his guru; who betrays others; who is wicked; who betrays friends; who murders truth; who is sinful; who steals a gift meant for another; who sells a daughter; who encroaches on other's lands; who gives false witness; who steals a Brahmin's property; who steals items received in trust; who uses bulls for personal conveyance; who performs worship of demigods in exchange for payment (a devala or grāma-yāji); who eats the food of śūdras; who eats the food on the śrāddha days of the śūdras; who is a Brahmin devoid of devotion to Krishna; who is wicked and ferocious; who is a murderer; who is devoid of devotion to guru; who is afflicted with diseases; who always speaks lies; who approaches a Brahmin's wife for sex; who is a śūdra; who approaches his mother for sex; who cuts sacred banyan trees; who is a wife that kills her husband; who kills one's father and mother; who kills those who come under his protection; or who is a brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya, or śūdra who steals jewels and gold. 🍌

— Nārada Pañcarātra 1.6.40-42, 45-51. Adapted from the translation by Swami Vijnananand. Parimal Publications. Delhi. 1997.

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